

Two weeks ago, President Obama challenged Congress to double down on the effort to reach an agreement to raise the nation's debt ceiling by August 2nd. "It's not going to get easier; it's going to get harder. So we might as well do it now; pull off the Band-Aid, eat our peas," he said. A week away from the August 2nd deadline, the House has answered the president's call by serving up a rather large bowl of peas in the form of a serious plan to cut and cap government spending and begin the task of balancing the budget. Unfortunately, the president has no appetite to join us at the dinner table.

A recent CNN poll asked over 1,000 Americans whether they favored a proposal to raise the debt ceiling only if a balanced budget amendment were passed by both houses of Congress and substantial spending cuts and caps on future spending were approved. A resounding 66 percent said yes. When put to the test, last week the House voted 224 to 190 to do just that.

The Cut, Cap and Balance Act, which I cosponsored and voted for, is the most serious medicine yet offered to cure the country's massive debt. Rather than simply treating the symptoms as suggested by the president and some in the Senate, the House Cut, Cap and Balance Act gets to the heart of the illness – Washington's insatiable appetite for unchecked government spending.

The Cut, Cap and Balance Act is an extension of the House Republican leadership's position that the nation's debt ceiling should only be lifted if the president agrees to an equal or greater amount of spending cuts with enforceable limitations on future spending.

The president still offers no plan of his own while the Senate has, so far, only managed to come up with a plan composed of tax increases and vague outlines of spending cuts, which lack adequate long-term enforcement.

In contrast, the House-passed Cut, Cap and Balance Act tackles the debt crisis on three fronts. It cuts spending by \$111 billion next year (FY 2012) and sets in motion controls to lower government spending by \$5 trillion over the next ten years. Lastly, it requires the passage of a Balanced Budget Constitutional Amendment by Congress and its enrollment to the states for ratification prior to any congressional approval of an increase in the debt limit.

Forty nine states, including Alabama, currently operate under a Balanced Budget Amendment and such a mechanism provides the best guarantee to prevent future overspending that has brought us to this \$14.3 trillion debt crisis. Unfortunately, the Senate has already rejected the Cut, Cap and Balance Act and the president never gave it a chance, dismissing it out of hand.

Leadership is more than talk. It is courageous action. The House has demonstrated leadership in passing the Cut, Cap and Balance Act and in continuing to stand up for real, enforceable spending cuts. Mr. President, we've eaten our peas. It's now your turn.

Justice Department Agrees to Pursue Audit of Oil Spill Claims System:

A week after the House Appropriations Committee approved legislation that included my call for an independent audit of the BP oil spill damage claims process, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and Gulf Coast Claims Facility (GCCF) Claims Czar Ken Feinberg have agreed to move forward on this longstanding request.

While I applaud the decision, I also urge that it be done quickly. We must never forget that the real victims of last year's spill were the people who live on the Gulf Coast and whose livelihoods were in some cases destroyed by what happened. The lack of consistency, transparency and accountability in the claims approval process has attracted Justice Department criticism and lawsuits from a number of Gulf States, including Alabama.

I believe an independent audit should be conducted as soon as possible before another claim is either denied or only given a few pennies on the dollar.

Austal Earns Safety Award:

Austal USA, one of South Alabama's fastest growing manufacturers and poised to become one of Mobile's biggest employers, has been singled out for its outstanding safety record. The Shipbuilders Council of America (SCA) recently awarded Austal its 2010 Award for Excellence in Safety.

This honor is given to the shipyard members of the Association with the lowest total recordable incidence rates based on a quarterly injury and illness survey conducted by the SCA.

Austal is currently under contract to build up to ten of its innovative new high speed Littoral Combat Ships (LCS) for the Navy and up to 10 Joint High Speed Vessels (JHSV) for the Department of Defense.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

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